

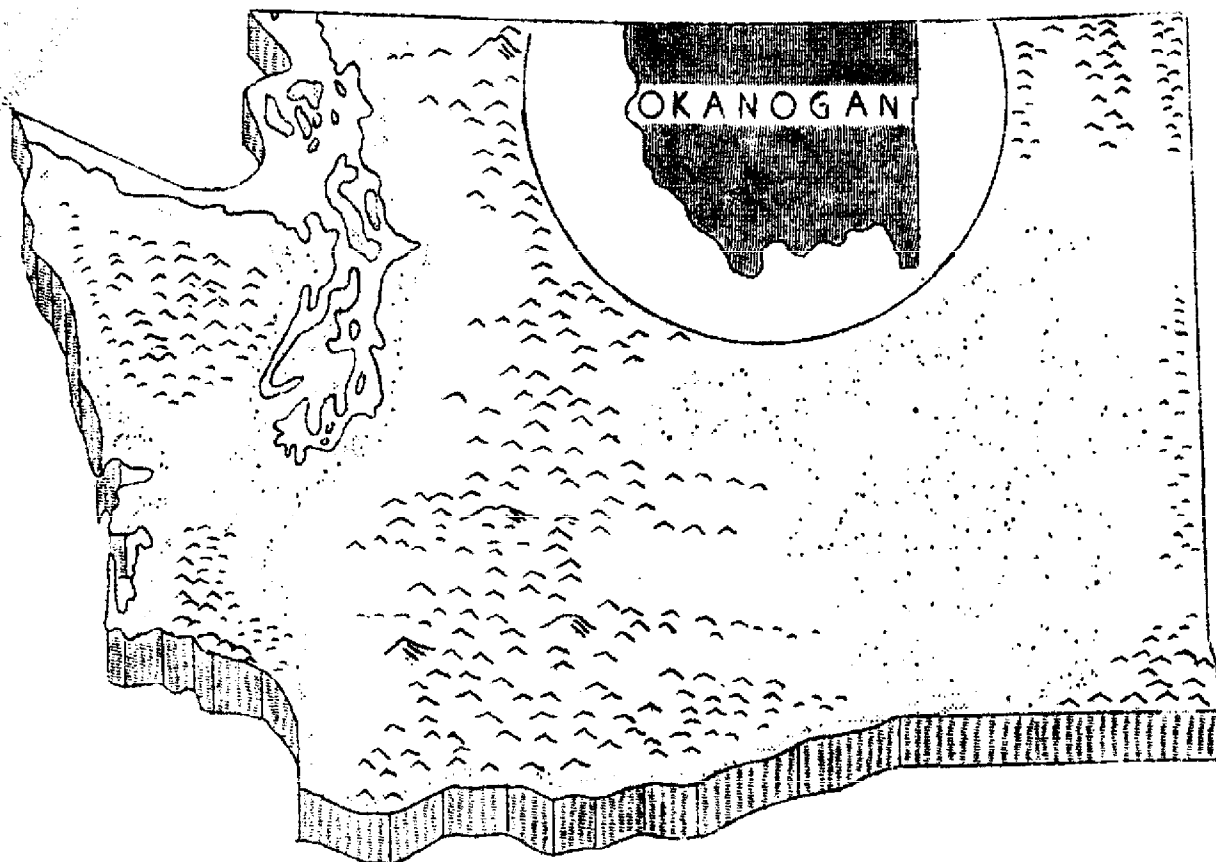
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OKANOGAN COUNTY

AGRICULTURE

WASHINGTON

COUNTY AGRICULTURAL DATA SERIES



WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Agricultural Marketing Service
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WASHINGTON CROP AND LIVESTOCK REPORTING SERVICE
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FOREWORD

This book on Okanogan County is one of an original series being devoted to the history and present nature of agriculture in each of the thirty-nine counties of the State of Washington. This project was initiated in 1956 through funds made available by Sverre N. Omdahl, Director, Washington State Department of Agriculture, 1948-56. State funds were matched by moneys from the United States Department of Agriculture under the Research and Marketing Act of 1946.

County agricultural data books are intended to serve a variety of needs. Continually changing conditions in a dynamic state such as Washington require constant planning by groups and individuals both in private enterprise and public service. Comprehensive knowledge of land resources, population and agricultural-economic trends in a local area such as Okanogan County is of great value. This book will be useful for reference in public and private instruction by vocational agriculture and social studies teachers in Okanogan County schools. It has been devised also to inform adults interested in knowing more about their immediate area, as well as persons and enterprises concerned with agricultural production and marketing or prospective settlement and investment in the county.

Carefully selected geographic facts, agricultural history, population trends and statistical data are included to give an over-all appreciation of Okanogan County. The enumerations of the United States Censuses of Population and Agriculture since 1890 and recent estimates of the Washington State Census Board are summarized to give a perspective of development since the establishment of Okanogan County in 1888. Facts on topography, soil, climate and forests which influence farming are integrated from surveys and reports of government agencies. Estimates of leading crops by years since 1939 by the Washington Crop and Livestock Reporting Service provide a measure of the trend in the agriculture of the county farm industry.

Acknowledgment is accorded the professional work of several persons. Immediate direction was under Emery C. Wilcox, Agricultural Statistician in Charge, Estimates Division, Agricultural Marketing Service, United States Department of Agriculture. Supervision, research and cartographic illustration was performed by Dr. Woodrow R. Clevinger, Market Analyst, Washington State Department of Agriculture. Lloyd J. Mercer, student in Agricultural Economics, Washington State College and resident of Addy, Stevens County, wrote the sections on pattern of agriculture, crops, livestock and marketing and collected much original information. Mr. Richard Perry, of the Washington State Department of Agriculture, and Leonard W. Orvold, D. W. Barrowman and Christian A. Stokstad, Agricultural Statisticians, Agricultural Marketing Service, United States Department of Agriculture, gave valuable assistance. The clerical staff of the Washington Crop and Livestock Reporting Service prepared tabular material for the book.

J. D. Dwyer, Director
Washington State Department of Agriculture

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PART I

History of Okanogan County Agriculture

Introduction

Okanogan County, a land of forested highlands and valley farmlands, is located on the Canadian border of north central Washington. One of the early sections of the state to be occupied by American fur traders, miners and settlers, it has grown steadily in population and in importance in the production of tree fruits and livestock.

With a land area of 5,295 square miles, Okanogan is the largest county of Washington. It is also among the first 25 counties of the United States in terms of land area. Okanogan is slightly larger than the state of Connecticut, and it is considerably more extensive in area than Delaware and Rhode Island combined.

Because over three-fourths of the surface is mountainous, the population density is small. In 1955 the population of Okanogan County was 29,700 and the average about five persons per square mile. The inhabitants are concentrated mostly in the county's two major valleys--the Okanogan and the Methow. Since 1880 the valley lands have attracted a steady stream of Americans and European immigrants. The population has increased five-fold since 1900 when it was 4,689.

The economic history has been characterized by a steady growth of agriculture in close relationship to non-farm employment in construction, mining and forest industries. In 1950, the income from agriculture greatly exceeded wages, interest and other forms of income from non-farm occupations. In an agricultural ranking of the Washington counties based on value of products sold in 1954, Okanogan ranked thirteenth in contribution to the total value of all Washington farm products marketed.

Okanogan County agriculture has changed, progressed and expanded. In a century of time, settlers of varied origins and nationalities have developed 1,770 farms. In 1954, all the farm land and farm buildings within Okanogan County were estimated to have a value of \$42,840,000 according to the United

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States Census of Agriculture.

History 1/

Before the arrival of white men, the present Okanogan County valleys were occupied by the Okanogan Indians. These people had the Interior Salish language also used by the Flathead, Kalispel, Spokane and Wenatchi tribes of northern Idaho and Washington. By common usage of early fur traders and prospectors the Indian word "Okanogan" was given to the area. It means "rendezvous" and refers to the place where the Okanogan River joins the Columbia. This site was a council and trading place for Indians and fur traders.

The Okanogans were riverside sedentary villagers in the winter, living in houses made of cattail (tule rush) mats. They fished for salmon in the Columbia, Okanogan and Methow Rivers. When the fur traders arrived they were active as trappers. In the summer season they were nomadic, traveling widely over the valleys and mountains to gather food. A wide variety of roots, berries, seeds and game were collected, then dried or smoked for storage.

Living habits were changed after they came into possession of horses and livestock about 1850. By 1870, through treaty provisions with the United States, most of the Okanogan Indians were living on the Colville Indian Reservation in the southeastern corner of the county. This reservation is the largest in the state, comprising about 500,000 acres in Okanogan County and 865,000 acres in Ferry County. Members of the Lake, Lower Spokane, Upper Spokane, San Poil, Nespelem and Kalispell tribes also moved into this reservation. By 1905 about 3,400 Indians were enrolled under the Colville Agency.

David Thompson, an English geographer and explorer, attached to the fur-trading North West Company, was probably the first white man to see the Okanogan area. During 1807-1810, he crossed the Rocky Mountains of Canada and explored the upper Columbia River drainage basin.

American settlement in the present area of Washington State was first made in 1811 at Fort Okanogan. In an effort to compete with British fur trading companies, John Jacob Astor's Pacific Fur Company established this post at the junction of the Okanogan and Columbia Rivers.

In 1813 Fort Okanogan was sold to the British North West Company and in 1825 came under control of Hudson Bay Company. The fur trading post operated until 1855. By the treaty of 1846 the 49th parallel was established as the

1/ This historical summary has been derived from four sources:

- (1) The Wenatchee Daily World, Wenatchee, Washington, 50th Anniversary Edition, July 3, 1955.
- (2) Richard F. Steele, History of North Washington, Western Historical Publishing Company, 1904.
- (3) Robert Nelson Young, "Geography of the Okanogan Valley," Master of Arts Thesis, geography, University of Washington, 1948.
- (4) Richard M. Perry, "The Counties of Washington", Secretary of State, State of Washington, Olympia 1943. (Mimeographed). See section on Okanogan County.

United States-Canadian boundary and Okanogan was undisputed as American territory. Fort Okanogan had a considerable influence over the area. The fur resources of the Okanogan Valley were marketed at this point by the Indians. Through this post Indians acquired horses, some cattle and the beginning of agriculture. In 1838 at this post the Catholic Missionary, Father de Smet, introduced Christianity.

After the Indian War of 1855-56, American settlers began arriving in the Okanogan area. The Washington Territorial Governor, Isaac Stevens, negotiated peace treaties with the Yakima and Klickitat Indians and other allied tribes in 1855. Previously the hostile anti-white settler activities of the Indians covering a large area had discouraged white settlement in eastern Washington. The U.S. War Department even had prohibited white settlement in the general area during the Indian War.

The Washington Territorial Legislature created Okanogan County on February 2, 1888, being organized from the western part of older Stevens County. The mining town, Conconully, was the first county seat. Later when mining was less important, the seat was moved to the city of Okanogan. The first Census of the county in 1890 showed a population of 1,467 persons.

Early land and village settlement was stimulated by discoveries of gold and silver deposits. There were several "gold rushes" into the mountainous areas of north central Washington between 1856 and 1875. Gold-bearing gravels of the Similkameen River in the Loomis district attracted a migration of miners up the Okanogan Valley beginning in 1859. Gold veins were discovered in the Conconully district in 1871. While prospecting brought adventurous frontiersmen to the Methow and Okanogan Valleys, mining on a large scale did not begin until after 1887 and gave the main start to the valley communities which later became agricultural and lumber centers.

The Donation Land Act of 1850 and the Homestead Act of 1862 interested some in making land claims for general and livestock farming. Farms of 160 and 640 acres were claimed and the grassland ranges of the public domain were used freely but often with dispute between Indians and whites or between different white cattlemen.

The first white man to settle and farm in the Okanogan Valley was Hiram F. "Okanogan" Smith. In 1858 he established a trading store at Lake Osoyoos near Oroville. On the shores of this lake he planted 1,200 apple trees and other assorted fruits. This marked the beginning of Okanogan's important fruit industry.

Livestock farming--cattle and horses--was the primary pioneer use of the farmlands and extensive ranges. Some of the prominent pioneers were livestock men. L. C. Malott, whose name is given to the town of Malott, was a leading rancher of the lower Okanogan Valley. "Indian" Edwards of the upper valley, is noted in county history for his sale of 900 horses in one lot to the British Government during the Boer War (1899-1902). Coxey George, an Indian, operated a large herd of cattle and horses on the reservation in the Nespelem-Colville district. Sheep were introduced to the ranges in 1901. In 1903 there were 1,700 head of beef cattle in the Okanogan Valley and 1,000 head were marketed,

according to Steele 1/. This source also recorded that about 20,000 sheep were sold from Okanogan ranches in 1903. Early livestock farming required long drives on the old "Cariboo Trail" to marketing points at Riverside, Omak, Okanogan or Brewster, where cattle were loaded in river boats and barges. Many cattle were driven as far as to Wenatchee on trails. Early farming in hay, grain, livestock and fruit received a large impetus when the Great Northern Railway completed its branch line from Wenatchee to Oroville in 1906. With better access, ore, lumber, livestock and fruit could be marketed at a much cheaper cost. Overland cattle drives and barging of goods on the Okanogan River were no longer necessary.

The railroad system enabled a large number of new settlers from eastern states and immigrants from Europe to move into Okanogan County. It also influenced an expansion of irrigated farming of fruit and hay and some lumbering. The population increased almost three-fold between 1900 and 1910, going from 4,689 to 12,887.

Irrigation developments brought an agricultural "boom" between 1905 and 1920. Bert Robinson, who had started a private irrigation system on Salmon Creek in the 1880's, worked for approval of a Federal irrigation project in the Okanogan Valley. Under the Federal Reclamation Act of 1902, the Okanogan Project was started in 1905 by the Department of Interior. The project brought 1,425 acres of Pogue Flat between Omak and Okanogan under irrigation. By 1918 over 6,500 acres were in irrigated crops--primarily apples and alfalfa.

In addition to the pioneers mentioned, other organizations have influenced the agricultural history of Okanogan County. The Bureau of Reclamation, Okanogan Project, had a large influence in increasing production and the acreage in crops. The early Northwest Apple Grower's League aided orchardists in marketing fruit. The Washington State Tree Fruit Experiment Station at Wenatchee improved apple and other fruit farming. The Washington State Horticultural Association has advanced the tree fruit industry. The Extension Service, through County Agents located at Okanogan, has had a large influence on agricultural development.

1/ Richard F. Steele, History of North Washington, p. 489.